

Destruction and becoming in the psychoterapeutical relationship on the basis of Sabina Spielrein's study entitled 'Destruction as cause of Becoming'

EMESE MOLNAR*

The life and work of *Sabina Spielrein* is closely interrelated, since the former patient became a doctor studying schizophrenia, treating psychoses, a psychoanalytic researching the sensitive, deep rooted connections in the course of few years' time. She was admitted in 1904 to the Burghözli mental hospital near Zurich with schizoid-type hysterical symptoms. She was the first patient of the then assistant lecturer *Carl Gustav Jung* with whom he practiced psychoanalytic therapy (Etkind, 1999, 266.). She was the 'test case' (McGuire, 1974, 228-230). Her symptoms probably started at the age of four when she saw her father beating her younger brother's naked bottom. From that time on she could not get away from the idea of defecating on his father' hand (Etkind, 1999). These symptoms were later changed to and supplemented with anal arousal and masturbation. *Freud* (1995) highlighted childhood sexuality and traumatisation in this hysterical symptom formation, in which the unconscious phantasies of seducing the parent plays the main role. It well refers to the intensity of the months of 'therapy honeymoon' that *Spielrein* was released from the hospital in ten months' time and she started her medical studies then as an outpatient.

She received a doctoral degree in 1911 defending her dissertation entitled 'The psychological content of a schizophrenic case' (Bettelheim, 1996). It is at that time she started to discover that the sexual drive is not the only force in a human being – as was thought by *Freud* since then. Parallel and opposite to it there exists another instinct – the instinct of destruction, the desire to destroy one's life. The first time she spoke about it publicly was on 25 November 1911 on the meeting of the Vienna psychoanalytic Society. Though this idea was not received with outbursting enthusiasm and neither *Freud* agreed with it initially, he did make a reference to it in his work 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' published nine years later; and later in his life he made Eros and Thanatos as the ideas of the two equivalent, basic instincts of human nature the foundation of his theory (Etkind, 1999). In the meanwhile his relationship with *Jung* became a friendship and on the part of *Spielrein* it probably

* Psychologist, PhD student, University of Pécs, theoretical psychoanalysis program. E-mail: msemolnar@gmail.com

transformed to love, to passion (Carotenuto, 1982). Her private life and scientific career as well as the difficulty and complexity of her role between and next to *Freud* and *Jung* remains interwoven all along. Relying on her own emotions, thoughts and pains, she transformed her experiences into her scientific work: the need for cognition, the importance of being able to love, the sexual fear and the related fear from disintegration and the death instinct inherent in the sexual drive. Her fate and life experience, her illness and recovery, love and disappointment, loneliness and struggling helped her in framing innovative and fruitful ideas in her work. She puts each and every action in her life into her professional work; living through, transferring, reshaping and making it conscious – she wrote and spelled it out. Pain, death, destruction and rebirth play the most important role in her own experiences. As though she were in the deepest depths, tempted by the longing for death, destruction and destroying, and, at the same time, she lived and loved life with unbelievable power and energy.

She first elaborates her ideas of the instinct of destruction and death as well as their relationship with the sexual drive in her productive article of 1912 entitled ‘Destruction as Cause of Becoming’. She describes the counterparts of love and disgust as well as their dividual and the individual and relates them both to the sexual motivation and the destructive component of the sex instincts. When the sexual desire arises we feel fear and distress of passing out – of the destruction of the individual – but we overcome this feeling and long for uniting with the other. It becomes possible, because the passing of the former life – or rather the individual – serves the creating of a new one; the male side dissolves in the female side and the female side undergoes changes, receiving a new form through the foreign intruder. Therefore this change affects the whole organism: destruction and reconstruction takes place. So as we live through pleasure at becoming while driven by the reproductive instinct, in the same way we are driven by the destructive component of the sex instinct in case of disgust and fear (Spielrein, 2008). *Spielrein*’s personal and passionate relationship with *Jung* that went beyond the initial doctor-patient relationship; its complexity and difficulty, as *Jung* himself interpreted to *Freud*, promoted and put into the foreground the basic concepts arising from the psychotherapeutic relationship: the thoughts about the role of transference and especially counter transference, the importance of the healing love as well as the birth of the self-experience therapy. The correspondence between the two great thinkers began due to *Spielrein* in 1906 and in December of the same year *Freud* already writes about the importance of transference to *Jung*: “... our cures are brought about through the fixation of the libido prevailing in the unconscious (transference), and that this transference is most readily obtained in hysteria. Transference provides the impulse necessary for understanding and translating the language of the unconscious; where it is lacking, the patient does not make the effort or does not listen when we submit our translation to him. Essentially, one might say, the cure is effected by love. And actually transference provides the most cogent, indeed, the only unassailable proof that neuroses are determined by the individual’s love life” (McGuire, 1974, 11-13).

Therefore the change, about which *Spielrein* also writes, helps to destroy the old, not very well functioning relationships through the love and acceptance in the psychotherapeutic relationship in order to help more effective relationships come into being. Three years later *Freud* writes about the redirection of a therapist’s feelings toward a client – that is he explains the meaning and the importance of the counter transference: “... They help us to develop the thick skin we need and to dominate ‘counter-transference’, which is after all a permanent problem for us; they teach us to displace our own affects to best advantage. They are a ‘blessing in disguise’” (McGuire, 1974, 230-232).

In her above mentioned work *Spielrein* (2008) agrees with *Freud* in saying that the basis of every psychical production is that we long for pleasure and try to avoid pain. Besides, she takes the opinion that the Self, as well as the unconscious processes are governed by such whiffs of mind that are established deeper inside and have no connection with the emotional reactions. The feeling of pleasure is the affirmation of these demands emerging from the deeper parts. It happens that pain causes pleasure, though it should result in sorrow, since pain, to which the self-preserving instinct resists, corresponds to a kind of trauma. Therefore it seems that something deep in our soul, however paradox it may seem, wants this self-injury and reacts to it with pleasure. This destruction that serves becoming may help us recovering from the illness; and the id can reborn from this self-injury.

The self-preserving instinct is a simple instinct with positive aspects only, and static, in which its task is to defend the already existing individual from the outside effects. On the other hand, the reproductive instinct, that has to dissolve the old in order to create the new, has both a positive and a negative component at the same time. It is expressed in the assimilation tendencies when the 'material nature' differentiates. That is why the birth of the negative component calls forth the positive component and vice versa; and that it is dynamic since it intends to 'wake' the individual in a new form. "No change can take place therefore without previously destroying the old state" (Spielrein, 2008, 31). *Spielrein* analyses *Nietzsche's* idea of the eternal return and describes the notion of superhuman being as in which the close identification of *Nietzsche* with his mother is expressed – in the love relationship with one's mother one sees himself as his own mother and his mother as himself. The longing for cognition is nothing else for her than love, the desire for creation as well as – the mother-sea analogy – the longing for the mother living in ones own depths (Spielrein, 2008). This is in line with the idea of *Winnicott* (1971), according to which it is the pure feminine part of the immature personality that is in contact with the mother – that is the infant becomes the mother and the object becomes the subject. "*Nietzsche's* conscience does not live in the present due to the autoerotic isolation, rather in its own depths" (Spielrein, 2008, 31) – that belongs to the time when the young child in a passive way behaves like a woman with the mother while suckling. By uniting with the mother in love, he himself becomes a reproducer, a creator, a life-giver. For him the mother is himself and he is – his own mother.

In case of each love we have to differentiate between the emerging ideas of two different kinds. The one is – the way we love, the other – the way we are being loved. In the first case we are the subject and we are in love with the object projected to the outside world. In the second case we become the object of love and we are in love with ourselves. For the man, whose actual task is to conquer the woman, the first ideas are given preference, on the contrary, for the woman, whose task is to bind the man to herself, the latter ideas dominate. In love when the one who is in love dissolves in the love of the subject of love is a new life in the beloved person. "If love is not present than a strange power influences the ideas of the psychological and physical individual, just like the ideas of annihilation or death during sexual acts" (Spielrein, 2008, 32). *Spielrein* explains life and death with the help of the Earth-Water symbolism for which she mainly uses the historical material collected by mainly *Wünsche* and *Kohle*. In The Song of the Nibelungs Brunhild (the Earth), who is in a winter sleep is being redeemed by Siegfried, the victorious light (the Sun): with his sword he cuts through his armour (the layer of ice), and this way inseminates her. Brunhild similarly to Eve, herself acts against the order of her father, and similarly to the expulsion of Eve from the Garden of Eden, Brunhild is expelled from the divine empire. Because Brunhild broke the order falls asleep in a near-death state, from what the kiss of Siegfried, the spring sun redeems her. "The death-wish is often a wish of dying in love" (Spielrein, 2008, 42). Brunhild dies in the heat of love: "she slowly disappears, dissolves in Siegfried, the flame of the redeemer sun" (Spielrein, 2008, 43). According to *Spielrein* it is important because each image is searching for another one that is similar but not the same in which it can dissolve and can be transformed. This power of comprehension based on the similar idea-content brings forth sympathy, and as a result we would like to give more. This can reach a level where we would wish to give all ourselves to the other person. This phase is accompanied by the most dangerous feeling of happiness, as the dissolution happens in the similar, in love. *Spielrein* (2008) links at this stage the sexual fear of the schizophrenic people with the fear of disintegration. The fear of being completely dissolved, getting lost and being destroyed in the beloved person. This is the fear of loosing one's self (Freud, 1997). "To love and to get lost – these two belong together ever since eternity. To want to love: it means to be ready to die!" (*Nietzsche* by Spielrein, 2008, 30.) In the psychotherapeutic relation the strong ties emerging in the patient may also strengthen this threat of fusion. This is frightening, but can be very much desired as well. At the same time, in the transfer situation that arises and is getting stronger continuously the imaginations and urges that stand in the way of development must be destroyed – which are destructive in themselves according to the concept system of Klein (1999).

There is a lot of similarity between the northern Siegfried and the eastern Christ: Siegfried (similarly to Christ) is Sun God, whose love is the mother earth. Christ (similarly to Siegfried) is a rescue-type, who sacrifices himself for humankind. When he is crucified on the Tree of Life, he is hanging on it just like a fruit. When he dies he falls on mother earth and similarly to the fruits, inseminates it. This insemination leads to the formation of the new life, the resurrection of the dead (Spielrein, 2008). The death and resurrection of Christ equalized the sin of Adam. When God sentenced Adam and Eve to death, basically he allowed them to taste the forbidden fruit. The other punishment means the same, as Adam must cultivate the soil by the sweat of his brow and Eve has to give birth to her child while suffering great pains. So, we can say, that the punishment is “the damage to the individual, as proliferation demands the destruction of the individual” (Spielrein, 2008, 44). While the child is still in the body of the mother, it does not have a separate life. “In mythology this is phantasm-death, like for example the empire of Persephone, where only a conjecture exists of life and everything seems to be a silhouette. In the ‘mother’ there is no light and dark, up and down, there are no opposites, as there is no differentiation from the ancient mother, the ancient substance” (Spielrein, 2008, 47). Just like in the psychotherapeutic relationship. When the creature becomes an individual organism that is when life and death exists for him. In terms of psychotherapeutic relationship the condition of convalescence and development or source of the dissolving and release of the transfer. Therefore “life is the source of death, and death is the source of life” (Spielrein, 2008, 47).

Spielrein therefore comes to the conclusion that destruction is the basis for all kind of origin and development; and we can find the reason of origin in all kinds of dissociation. The essence of instinct for death is that it cannot be separated from instinct for life, and the continuation of life in another person. Another aspect of love is the desire that aims at the annihilation of its subject; this is why every birth is a death, and every death is a birth at the same time. She relies on the thought of *Freud*, the ambivalence concept of *Bleuler*, the bipolarity concept of *Stekel*, and the idea of *Jung*, who says, that besides every positive thing there is its negative side. It is enough if the instinct strengthens a little bit in ourselves on the other’s account and it already seems like we only desire that one. Under normal circumstances the instinct for life is a bit stronger, because existence is the result of destruction, it depends on destruction. Death in itself is horrible, but as a destroying component of it that leads to the origin, it is curing. “You have to know how to rise above yourself (destruction), otherwise how you would be able to create the higher, the child!” (Spielrein, 2008, 33) This is what best explains what happens to the patient in the psychotherapeutic relation: the patient finds to way to himself through the dissolution of transfer, gives birth and creates itself. And in this creation “revives from its own self” (Zsélyi, 2007).

REFERENCES

- Bettelheim, B. (1996). Titkos asszimetria. *Thalassa* (7), 3: 101-114.
- Carotenuto, A. (1982). *A secret symmetry. Sabina Spielrein between Jung and Freud*. Pantheon books, New York.
- Etkind, A. (1999). Sabina Spielrein: tiszta játék egy orosz lánnyal. In *A lehetetlen Erőszja. A pszichoanalízis története Oroszországban* (246-323). Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest.
- Freud, S. (1995). *A szexuális élet pszichológiája*. Cserépfalvi Kiadó, Budapest.
- Freud, S. (1997[1917]). Gyász és melankólia. In *Ösztönök és ösztönsorsok* (129-144). Budapest, Filum Kiadó, 1997.
- Klein, M. (1999). *Irigység és hála*. Animula Kiadó, Budapest.
- McGuire, W. (1974). Letter from Sigmund Freud to C.G. Jung, December 6, 1906. *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*, 11-13.
- McGuire, W. (1974). Letter from C.G. Jung to Sigmund Freud, June 4, 1909. *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*, 228-230.

- McGuire, W. (1974). Letter from Sigmund Freud to C.G. Jung, June 7, 1909. *The Freud/Jung Letters: The Correspondence Between Sigmund Freud and C.G. Jung*, 230-232.
- Spielrein, S. (2008). A pusztítás, mint a keletkezés oka. In *Thalassa* 3: 13-51.
- Zsélyi, F. (2007). Kristeva és Colette. *Thalassa* (18), 2-3: 65-86.
- Winnicott, D.W. (1971). *Játszás és valóság*. Animula Kiadó, Budapest.

